

Handout Six

Purposeful Sampling

Here are a few purposeful sampling methods, with examples of evaluation questions and interviewees for each method.

Sampling method	Evaluation Question	Interviewees
Typical cases (<i>Provides a profile of a typical situation</i>)	What type of problems do public reference librarians face when trying to help users find health information?	Public reference librarians ("typical" may be based on demographics, e.g., service time; type of library)
Extreme cases (<i>Outstanding successes and/or notable failures</i>)	"What factors motivates retirees to become frequent users of online health information resources?"	Retirees from a seniors health information training course that became frequent users
Maximum variation (<i>Helps find common themes across diverse cases</i>)	"What are the health information needs of community-based organizations in our city?"	Representatives from CBOs in variety of health, social, and service areas
Criterion (<i>Helps with quality assurance</i>)	How can the session be improved to increase completion rates?	Training participants who dropped out of a Web 2.0 course after 1 or 2 sessions
Snowball or chain sampling (<i>Identifies the most informed participants</i>)	How do faith-based advisors use online health information resources	Faith-based advisors who use online health information successfully after a "train-the-trainer" session, as recommended by the program coordinator
Purposeful random sampling (<i>increases credibility of results, particularly for politically-charged decision-making</i>)	Are there enough benefits to the technology award program to continue it?	Random sample of technology award recipients
Critical case (<i>Makes a case dramatically; "if they can't do it, no one can."</i>)	Is our web site user-friendly?	Tech-savvy college students (because if this group can't navigate the site, less tech-literate users won't, either)

Source: Patton, Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (3rd Ed), 2002.